



Digital Literacy and Citizenship in the 21st Century

Educating, Empowering, and Protecting America's Kids
A Common Sense Media White Paper

Adults may see it as digital life – but to kids, it’s “just life.” Welcome to their world.

- » 93% of kids 12 to 17 are online ¹
- » More than 35 hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube every minute ²
- » A majority of teens view their cell phone as the key to their social life ³
- » If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous in the world ⁴

¹ Pew Internet and American Life Project, “Generations Online in 2009.”

² YouTube Blog, “Great Scott! Over 35 Hours of Video Uploaded Every Minute to YouTube,” November 10, 2010.

³ CTIA – The Wireless Association and Harris Interactive, “Teenagers: A Generation Unplugged,” September 12, 2008.

⁴ San Francisco Chronicle, “The Many Facets of Facebook,” January 1, 2011.

What Is Digital Life?

Digital life describes the media world that our kids inhabit 24/7 – online, on mobile phones and other devices, and anywhere media is displayed. By definition, digital media is participatory. Users can create content, and anything created in this digital life becomes instantly replicable and viewable by vast invisible audiences. Kids use digital media to socialize, do their homework, express themselves, and connect to the world. New technologies give our kids unprecedented powers of creation and communication, making the world more accessible at earlier and earlier ages.

The Need for Digital Literacy and Citizenship

This dynamic new world requires new comprehension and communication skills – as well as new codes of conduct – to ensure that these powerful media and technologies are used responsibly and ethically. Much of the interaction in this digital world happens at a distance, which can diminish kids' perception of cause and effect, action and consequence. Additionally, digital life can take place under the cloak of anonymity and alias, making it easier to participate in unethical and even illegal behaviors.



Digital Literacy and Citizenship means the ability to:

- » use technology competently
- » interpret and understand digital content and assess its credibility
- » create, research, and communicate with appropriate tools
- » think critically about the ethical opportunities and challenges of the digital world
- » make safe, responsible, respectful choices online

Digital Literacy and Citizenship programs are an essential element of media education and involve basic curriculum tools that foster critical thinking and creativity. These programs also include educational tools for kids, parents, and teachers that address both positive online behaviors that support collaboration and community and negative online behaviors to avoid – such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and revealing too much personal information.

What's at Stake

America's children are growing up in the center of a technological revolution. Digital media defines their lives in unprecedented ways; they spend more time online, texting, watching television and movies, and playing video games than they do in school or with their parents. The convergence of mobile technologies, unfiltered access to information, and user-generated content profoundly impacts how children grow and learn. The line between the possibilities and perils of digital life is thin. The stakes are high. Kids are more comfortable in this world than are most of the adults in their lives.



What do we, as adults, need to do to ensure that America's youth will have the knowledge, ethics, and skills they need to harness the power and the potential of this digital world?

This is the central question that requires urgent attention from parents, educators, policymakers, and the media industry. In partnership, we must create the teaching and parenting tools that will enable us to educate, empower, and, yes, protect our children.

The ease with which content and communications are created or retrieved, the instantaneous and often anonymous nature of digital communications and content creation, the definition of privacy as we know it – all these issues are now an essential part of a child's education. But the nature, location, and even responsibility for this education now occurs both inside and outside the classroom – indeed, the walls have come down between school and home. Thus teachers and parents face new and unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

Literacy and Citizenship Goals for the 21st Century

Educate.

Create tools that teach digital media literacy and citizenship.

Empower.

Give parents and teachers the tools and resources they need to raise kids to be informed digital citizens.

Protect.

Define a healthy balance between safe and smart digital media practices for kids and families and other important societal rights.

“In the 21st century, students must be fully engaged. This requires the use of technology tools and resources, involvement with interesting and relevant projects, and learning environments – including online environments – that are supportive and safe.”

*– Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education,
remarks to the 2010 Association of American Publishers Annual Meeting*

This White Paper is an effort to outline the essential components of Digital Literacy and Citizenship and to frame the ways that they prepare children to learn and grow in the 21st century. Like the digital world itself, the concepts of Digital Literacy and Citizenship are complex and changing, and this paper is intended for constant updates and revisions, which can be found at **www.commonsense.org/digitalliteracy**.

Strategies for Teaching Digital Literacy and Citizenship

1. Redesign education to include Digital Literacy and Citizenship in every school in America.
2. Disseminate a basic curriculum that defines the standards of ethical behavior on digital platforms – for students, parents, and educators.
3. Educate and empower teachers so that they can understand and teach Digital Literacy and Citizenship.
4. Educate and empower parents about technology and important behavioral guidelines involving the use of digital media.

Today, more than 12,000 schools use Common Sense Media's free resources, available at **www.commonsense.org/educators**. These research-based curriculum tools provide lesson plans, classroom and homework activities, and interactive components that span three topics: online safety and security, digital citizenship, and research and information literacy. For more information, email **schools@commonsense.org**.



“We love how this curriculum meets kids where they are and brings up challenging topics in a fun, engaging, and accessible way. The curriculum addresses both the wonderful and exciting opportunities that new media presents to kids while at the same time arms them with practical tools for overcoming its pitfalls.”

– **Jeff Mao**, Learning and Technology Policy Director,
Maine Department of Education

To survive and thrive, today's students must be digitally literate, which means being able to use and understand digital technologies and messages. These new media literacies must become integral parts of their education, both for traditional studies (reading, writing, math, science) as well as for the 21st-century skills they will need to succeed (creativity, innovation, communication, critical thinking, civic participation, collaboration). Ensuring that our kids are prepared for the future requires the following essential initiatives:

1

Redesign education to include Digital Literacy and Citizenship in every school in America

Incorporate new media literacy into existing curricula/courses. New media literacy should be integrated into the curriculum of every school in America. In our interconnected online world, kids must be able to use digital tools to gather and apply information, to evaluate that information intelligently, and to create content ethically.

Teach basic technology skills in schools. Technological literacy is essential for our kids to succeed – in school and in the 21st-century workplace. They must understand computers, technology applications, and media production tools that will have an increasingly influential role in their lives. Using technology in the classroom can also deepen and enrich students' engagement with traditional studies.

Encourage creativity and innovation. The digital world offers kids unique opportunities to create and share content. All kids must be able to understand and employ ever more powerful media tools – and apply them in creative new ways. This creativity should be encouraged, along with a clear understanding of the differences between creating, altering, and borrowing content.

Deepen young people's communication and collaboration skills. The increasingly mobile digital media world offers an explosion of ways for kids to connect, communicate, and work together. Kids must learn new rules of proper communication and collaboration if they are to convey and absorb ideas in a responsible, effective, and pro-social manner. After all, with these opportunities come risks. For example, given the impact that cyberbullying has on students and school communities, schools play an important role in helping students and families safely navigate the digital world.

2

Disseminate Digital Literacy and Citizenship curriculum tools to all schools

Common Sense Media and other education groups have already developed curriculum resources and tools for Digital Literacy and Citizenship. While more than 12,000 schools have used Common Sense Media's curriculum tools, *every* student must know how to use digital media effectively and responsibly. Schools across the country must have access to lessons and resources that reflect the dynamic media landscape and get the time and support they need to incorporate the lessons into existing curricula at each grade level. Funding technology resources in under-served schools and communities is crucial to combatting the digital divide and essential to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to master 21st-century skills.

3

Fund professional development and training opportunities for educators

Teachers across the country need training in the fundamentals of Digital Literacy and Citizenship. Teachers must understand today's technologies and applications, as well as what their students are doing with them, if they are to successfully teach 21st-century skills and ethics. Teachers also need guidance about how to connect formal learning environments (schools) with informal learning environments (after-school programs, libraries, homes) as digital media and technology continue to break down the walls between the two. To encourage efficient and effective programs:

- » Create a national Digital Literacy Corps. This program would mobilize knowledgeable youth and adults to provide professional development and training for educators to improve their facility with technology, media, and the basic tenets of digital learning.
- » Provide professional development and support through existing structures, including state departments of education and community college and university systems.

4

Educate parents about digital technologies, use, and ethics

A parent's job is to protect and guide. Parents desperately need to understand not only the technologies that inform their children's lives, but also the issues around behavior and responsible use. In a world that is constantly developing, the first course of action should be to give parents the information and tools they need to teach their children about responsible, safe, and ethical behavior in the digital world. Schools as well as community programs (e.g. Boys and Girls Clubs), after-school activities, and parent engagement networks (e.g. PTAs) can facilitate the dissemination of this information.



Who We Are

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

More than 1.6 million people visit the Common Sense website every month for age-appropriate media reviews and parenting advice. Tens of millions more access our advice and information through our distribution partnerships with leading companies like Comcast, DIRECTV, Verizon, Time Warner Cable, Cox Communications, Facebook, Yahoo!, Google, Apple, Disney, Netflix, Best Buy, AOL, Symantec, and others.

COMMON SENSE MEDIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rich Barton	Co-Founder and Executive Chair, Zillow.com
Marcy Carsey	Founding Partner, Carsey-Werner Productions
Chelsea Clinton	New York University
James Coulter	Founding Partner, TPG
Geoffrey Cowan	University Professor, The Annenberg School for Communication at USC
April Delaney	President, Delaney Family Fund
John H.N. Fisher	Managing Director, Draper Fisher Jurvetson
Lycia Carmody Fried	Community Volunteer
Thomas J. Holland	Partner, Bain & Company, Inc.
Mitchell Kapor	Director, Mitchell Kapor Foundation
Lucinda Lee Katz	Head of School, Marin Country Day School
Gary E. Knell	President and CEO, Sesame Workshop
Robert L. Miller	President and CEO, Miller Publishing Group
William S. Price, III (<i>Chair</i>)	President, Classic Wines, LLC
Jesse Rogers	Founder, Altamont Capital
Susan F. Sachs	Former COO, Common Sense Media
James P. Steyer	Founder and CEO, Common Sense Media
Gene Sykes	Managing Director, Goldman, Sachs & Co.
Todor Tashev	Director, Omidyar Network
Deborah Taylor Tate	Former FCC Commissioner
Michael Tollin	Founding Partner, Tollin Productions
Lawrence Wilkinson (<i>Vice Chair</i>)	Co-Founder, Oxygen Media and Global Business Network
Anne Zehren	CEO, Kaboodle.com

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Aileen Adams	Chair, The Women's Foundation of California
Larry Baer	Chief Operating Officer, San Francisco Giants
Richard Beattie	Chairman, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Angela Glover Blackwell	Founder and CEO, PolicyLink
Geoffrey Canada	Founder and President, Harlem Children's Zone
Ramon Cortines	Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District
Colin Crowell	President, Crowell Strategies, LLC
Yogen Dalal	Managing Director, The Mayfield Fund
Steve Denning	Founding Partner, General Atlantic Partners
Susan Ford Dorsey	President, Sand Hill Foundation
Millard Drexler	Chairman and CEO, J. Crew
Ezekiel Emanuel, MD, PhD	Chair, Department of Clinical Bioethics, The National Institutes of Health
Robert Fisher	Director, GAP Inc.
Arjun Gupta	Founder & Managing Partner of TeleSoft Partners
F. Warren Hellman	Founding Partner, Hellman & Friedman
James Herbert II	President and CEO, First Republic Bank
David Hornik	Partner, August Capital
Omar Khan	President, Insight Strategy & Logic (ISL), Web Site Design
David Lawrence Jr.	President, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation
Nion McEvoy	Chairman and CEO, Chronicle Books
Nell Minow	Founder, The Corporate Library and Movie Mom
Newton Minow	Counsel, Sidley, Austin and Brown; Former FCC Chairman
James Montoya	Senior Vice President, The College Board
Becky Morgan	President, Morgan Family Foundation
Nancy Peretsman	Managing Director, Allen & Company Inc.
Philip Pizzo, MD	Dean, Stanford University School of Medicine
George Roberts	Founding Partner, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co.
Carrie Schwab Pomerantz	President, Charles Schwab Foundation
Alan Schwartz	CEO, Guggenheim Partners
Marshall Smith	Senior Adviser, Department of Education
Quincy Smith	Founding Partner, CODE Advisors
Thomas Steyer	Founding Partner, Farallon Capital
Robert S. Townsend	Partner, Morrison & Foerster LLP
Laura Walker	President, WNYC Radio
Alice Waters	Founder, Chez Panisse and Chez Panisse Foundation
Eugene Washington, MD	Dean, UCLA Medical School
Robert Wehling	Founder, Family Friendly Programming Forum; Former CMO, Procter & Gamble
Tim Zagat	Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Zagat Survey

BOARD OF POLICY ADVISORS

Angela Glover Blackwell	Founder and CEO, PolicyLink
Dr. Milton Chen	Executive Director, The George Lucas Educational Foundation
Michael Cohen	CEO, The Michael Cohen Group
Dr. Jeffrey Cole	Director, Center For The Digital Future
Ramon Cortines	Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District
Ezekiel Emanuel, MD, PhD	Chair, Department of Clinical Bioethics, The National Institutes of Health
Ellen Galinsky	Co-Founder and President, Families and Work Institute
Andrew Greenberg	President, Greenberg Qualitative Research, Inc.
Denis Hayes	President, The Bullitt Foundation
Dr. Donald Kennedy	President Emeritus, Stanford University; Editor-in-Chief, Science Magazine
David Lawrence Jr.	President, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation
Wendy Lazarus	Co-Founder and Co-Director, The Children's Partnership
Christopher Lehane	Political Communications Expert
Laurie Lipper	Co-Founder and Co-Director, The Children's Partnership
Philip Pizzo, MD	Dean, Stanford University School of Medicine
Dr. Alvin Poussaint	Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; Director of Media, Judge Baker Children's Center
Thomas Robinson, MD	Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine, Stanford University
Theodore Shaw	Professor, Columbia University
Marshall Smith	Senior Adviser, Department of Education



Common Sense Media
650 Townsend Street, Suite 435
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 863.0600
www.commonsense.org

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

Go to www.commonsense.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.